



BENJAMIN RUSH:

*The REVOLUTION'S DOCTOR of MEDICINE
and UNIVERSAL HUMANITARIAN.*

Erudite, multifaceted, tireless, though sometimes overly sensitive and more concerned with meeting the approval of others than befitting such a broad heart and elevated intellect, Benjamin Rush (1746-1813) was one individual able to unite Federalist centralists and New World Jeffersonians in concord. Albeit not without its dubious results; such as his clumsy association with the Conway cabal; his use of blood letting to treat patients;¹ criticized and questionable approach to and handling of the Yellow Fever epidemic of the 1790s, or his (in retrospect) jejune and too precipitous dismissal of the value of classical languages. Yet for all his foibles and sometimes shortsightedness -- and these must be recognized and acknowledged in order to portray him with justice -- the Philadelphia physician, writer, professor, and scientist oftentimes undertook many of the tasks and chores to build a better society; sloughed off or left in abeyance by others. Gluttony, gambling, idleness, immoral romanticism, smoking, drunkenness, cruelty, the death penalty, child abuse, slavery,² racism, religious bigotry, and atheism were just some of the medical quandaries and social demons he did not hesitate to take up the pen against, and with as resolute and dogged a determination in doing so as any of Washington's Light Infantry³ that waged battle in the field.

Youngest of the Pennsylvania delegates to affix their "John Hancock" to the Declaration of Independence, and after graduating at New Jersey College (Princeton) in 1760, Rush began his career studying medicine as an apprentice under a Philadelphia doctor, John Redman. He next, in 1766, went to Edinburgh to further his medical education; while at the same time was dispatched as an emissary to recruit Presbyterian Rev. Jonathan Witherspoon (later himself another signer) to fill the head chair at Princeton, and which, Rush, acting as an assistant to Richard Stockton,⁴ the formal representative of Princeton's trustees, succeeded in accomplishing. Rush further studied in London, and also found time to visit Paris. While in Scotland, England and France, he stayed for a while as family with Benjamin Franklin,⁵ the colonies agent at the Court of St. James, and met or had the occasion to view and hear sundry worthies and notables. Among these and whom he met or supped with personally or at a gathering were philosopher and

¹ Among his other, perhaps peculiar, prescriptions, Rush recommended chocolate as a medicine – a diagnostic deduction with which many since and to this day will, superfluous to add, readily concur.

² In 1773, he wrote and published the 36 page "An Address To the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America Upon Slave-Keeping. By a Pennsylvanian." The same year saw further his "A Vindication of the Address, to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of Negroes in America, in Answer to a Pamphlet entitled, 'Slavery Not Forbidden by Scripture; Or a Defence of the West-India Planters from the Aspersions Thrown out Against them by the Author of the Address.'"

³ And that included the elite contingent, largely Black, from the Rhode Island Regiment.

⁴ Stockton later was yet another Declaration signer. As well, Rush, as it happens, married his daughter Julia in Jan. 1776.

⁵ Of whom Rush remarks, "I never visited him without learning something."

historian David Hume; historian William Robertson;⁶ dynamo Methodist preacher Rev. George Whitefield; human rights champion Catharine Macauley; American Alderman of London William Lee (brother of Richard Henry, Francis Lightfoot, and Arthur); Whig parliamentary leader John Wilkes; American painter Benjamin West; Joshua Reynolds, and as a result of becoming acquainted with the latter: Dr. Samuel Johnson, and Oliver Goldsmith, and James Boswell; with whom he had dinner, and from which he took back with him his own Johnsonian anecdote.

As well, Rush saw David Garrick perform on stage; George III and family in Chapel, and heard Edmund Burke speak in Parliament.

In his autobiography, *My Travels in Life*, Rush recalled that same world many will remember humorously presented in *Joe Miller's Jests* (1739):

"Many characters have been given of the English nation. To different people the same objects often appear in different forms or colors. There was in my view at the time I was in London, a variety in the manners of the people of England, as great as their ranks and occupations. The nobleman, the commoner, the country gentleman of large and moderate fortune, the common farmer, the merchant, the shopkeeper, the tavern keeper, the tradesman of a large capital and his journeyman, the lawyer, the physician, the Bishop, the unbeneficed clergyman, the dissenting minister, the military officer and soldier, the sailor, the waterman, the lamplighter, the hackney coachman, the hawkers, the beggar, had each a specific character. They were all, it is true, in some points Englishmen, but in many more they were as dissimilar from each other as if they had belonged to different nations."

While in Paris, Rush visited Marquis of Mirabeau (father of the French Revolutionary leader of that name), and encyclopédiste Denis Diderot.⁷ He also, as he notes, traveled to Versailles and was very close by to view Louis VX attending mass.

Returning to Philadelphia in 1769, he set up his practice, and which included offering medical help gratis to the poor. Come the time of the Revolution, he was elected as delegate to Congress in July 1776: too late participate in the debates for Independence, but soon enough to sign the great Declaration. During Washington's retreat into New Jersey, Rush accompanied the army for a while and was present just after Trenton and at the battle of Princeton itself; where he acted as surgeon for both British and American injured soldiers, including the fatally wounded Gen. Hugh Mercer.

In April 1777, he was voted Surgeon General by Congress to head the military hospitals for the Middle Department; holding the post until he resigned on 30 Jan. 1778, and as a result of Congress refusal to support him in his proposed methods for reform and improvement in the medical branch of the government.

Of further note, Rush played an important roll in helping to combat the horrendous Yellow Fever epidemics in the period from 1793-1797. Though his methods for administering a cure did not always meet with approval, he was of invaluable help in promoting hygiene and sanitation while furnishing assistance to the sickly.

The rest of Rush's biography, which was (at large and by comparison) not so eventful, need not detain us here. We would note that his *Travels Through Life*⁸ one of the best written, lucid, and vivid Revolutionary War autobiographies, and includes manifold, rare, and priceless impressions and sketches; including, with respect to the latter, brief portraits of all the signers of the Declaration of Independence. In addition, there are still more on such as Patrick Henry, John Dickinson, Gates, Knox, William Alexander (Lord Stirling), Nathanael Greene ("He was a pupil of Genl. [Charles] Lee."), John Paul Jones, Arnold, and many more. Really, a student of American Revolutionary War biography is cheating him or herself by missing out on these.

⁶ One of Robertson's noted works is a multi-volume *The History of America* (1777, 1796).

⁷ Though he did not meet them, Rush was abundantly read in the works of Rousseau and Voltaire.

⁸ Available at <http://archive.org/details/memorialcontaini00rush>

Travels is easily worth a “Continental Army Series” article in and of itself. However, we would prefer you to get a hold of and read the whole thing. It won’t hurt, nevertheless, to give you one further, and edifying, quote from it:

[After describing and giving an account of the Tories and Loyalists.]

“The Whigs were divided by their conduct into, 1st. Furious Whigs who considered the tarring and feathering a Tory a greater duty and exploit than the extermination of a British army. These men were generally cowards and shrunk from danger when called into the field, by pretending sickness, or some family disaster. 2ndly. Speculating Whigs. These men infested our public councils as well as the army, and did the country great mischief. A Colonel of a regiment informed a friend of mine that he had made a great deal of money by buying poor horses for his wagon and selling them again for a large profit, after he had fattened them at the public expense. 3dly. Timid Whigs; the hopes of these people rose and fell with every victory and defeat of our armies. 4thly. Staunch Whigs; these were moderate in their tempers, but firm -- inflexible and persevering in their conduct.

“There were besides these two classes of people, a great number of persons who were neither Whigs nor Tories. They had no fixed principles, and accommodated their conduct to their interest, to events, and to their company. They were not without their uses. They prevented both parties in many instances from the rage of each other, and each party always found hospitable treatment from them.

“Perhaps the inhabitants of the United States might have been divided nearly into three classes, viz., Tories, Whigs, and persons who were neither Whigs nor Tories. The Whigs constituted the largest class. The third class were a powerful reinforcement to them, after the affairs of America assumed a uniformly prosperous appearance.

“I remarked further that many of the children of Tory parents were Whigs, so were the Jews in all the States.”⁹

In its place then, we have compiled a selection from Rush’s numerous discourses and essays. In spite of these writings rather old fashioned tone, I think many will still find here few edifying and relevant truths applicable to subsequent, including our own, times.

~~~\*\*\*~~~

Virtue is the living principle of a republic. To promote this, laws for the suppression of vice and immorality will be as ineffectual, as the encrease and enlargement of gaols. -- There is but one method of preventing crimes, and of rendering a republican form of government durable, and that is by disseminating the seeds of virtue and knowledge through every part of the state, by means of proper modes and places of education, and this can be done effectually only, by the interference and aid of the legislature. I am so deeply impressed with the truth of this opinion, that were this evening to be the last of my life, I would not only say to the asylum of my ancestors, and my beloved native country, with the patriot of Venice, “Esto perpetua,” [“Live completely!” or “Be Eternal!”] -- But I would add, as the last proof of my gratitude and affection for her, my parting advice to the guardians of her liberties, “To establish and support Public Schools in every part of the state.”

---

<sup>9</sup> There is also “The Historical Notes of Benjamin Rush, 1777;” first published in *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. XXVII, no.2, 1903, pp. 129-150, and can be acquired in .pdf at <http://archive.org/details/historicalnotes00rush> His “Commonplace Book for 1789-1813” usually accompanies printings of his *Travels*.

~ from “An Oration Delivered Before the American Philosophical Society, Held In Philadelphia on The 27th Of February, 1786; Containing An Enquiry Into The Influence of Physical causes Upon the Moral Faculty,” p. 40.

~~~\*\*\*~~~

Such is my veneration for every religion that reveals the attributes of the Deity, or a future state of rewards and punishments, that I had rather fee the opinions of Confucius or Mahom[m]ed inculcated upon our youth, than fee them grow up wholly devoid of a system of religious principles. But the (religion I mean to recommend in this place, is that of the New Testament.

It is foreign to my purpose to hint at the arguments which establish the truth of the Christian revelation. My only business is to declare, that all its doctrines and precepts are calculated to promote the happiness of society, and the safety and well being of civil government. A Christian cannot fail of being a republican. The history of the creation of man, and of the relation of our species to each other by birth, which is recorded in the Old Testament, is the best refutation that can be given to the divine right of kings, and the strongest argument that can be used in favor of the original and natural equality of all mankind. A Christian, I say, again, cannot fail of being a republican, for every precept of the Gospel inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness, which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and the pageantry of a court. A Christian cannot fail of being useful to the republic, for his religion teacheth him, that no man “liveth to himself.” And lastly, a Christian cannot fail of being wholly inoffensive, for his religion teacheth him, in all things to do to others what he would wish, in like circumstances, they should do to him.

I am aware that I dissent from one of those paradoxical opinions with which modern times abound; and that it is improper to fill the minds of youth with religious prejudices of any kind, and that they should be left to choose their own principles, after they have arrived at an age in which they are capable of judging for themselves. Could we preserve the mind in childhood and youth a perfect blank, this plan of education would have more to recommend it; but this we know to be impossible. The human mind runs as naturally into principles as it does after facts. It submits with difficulty to those restraints or partial discoveries which are imposed upon it in the infancy of reason. Hence the impatience of children to be informed upon all subjects that relate to the invisible world. But I beg leave to ask, why should we pursue a different plan of education with respect to religion, from that which we pursue in teaching the arts and sciences? Do we leave our youth to acquire systems of geography, philosophy, or politics, till they have arrived at an age in which they are capable of judging for themselves? We do not. I claim no more then for religion, than for the other sciences, and I add further, that if our youth are disposed after they are of age to think for themselves, a knowledge of one system, will be the best means of conducting them in a free enquiry into other systems of religion, just as an acquaintance with one system of philosophy is the best introduction to the study of all the other systems in the world.

~ from “Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic”¹⁰

~~~\*\*\*~~~

III. To train the youth who are intended for the learned professions or for merchandise, to the duties of their future employments, by means of useful amusements, which are *related* to, those employments, will be impracticable; but their amusements may be derived from cultivating a spot of ground; for where is the lawyer, the physician, the divine, or the merchant, who has not indulged or felt a passion, in some part of his life, for rural improvements? Indeed I conceive the seeds of knowledge in agriculture will be most productive, when they are planted in the minds of this class of scholars.

I have only to add under this head, that the common amusements of children have no connection with their future occupations. Many of them injure their cloaths, some of them waste their strength, and impair their health, and all of them prove more or less, the means of producing noise, or of exciting angry passions, both of which are calculated to beget vulgar manners. The Methodists have wisely banished every species of play from their college. Even the healthy and pleasurable exercise of swimming, is not permitted to their scholars, except in the presence of one of their masters.

Do not think me too strict if I here exclude gunning from among the amusements of young men. My objections to it are as follow.

1. It hardens the heart, by inflicting unnecessary pain and death upon animals.
2. It is unnecessary in civilized society, where animal food may be obtained from domestic animals, with greater facility.
3. It consumes a great deal of time, and thus creates habits of Idleness.
4. It frequently leads young men into low, and bad company.
5. By imposing long abstinence from food, it leads to intemperance in eating, which naturally leads to intemperance in drinking.
6. It exposes to fevers, and accidents. The newspapers are occasionally filled with melancholy accounts of the latter, and every physician must have met with frequent and dangerous instances of the former, in the course of his practice.

I know the early use of a gun is recommended in our country, to teach our young men the use of firearms, and thereby to prepare them for war and battle. But why should we inspire our youth, by such exercises, with hostile ideas towards their fellow creatures?

---

<sup>10</sup> *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical* (1806, 2nd edition), pp. 8-10. The contents of this volume originally appeared as pieces published in *The American Museum and Columbian Magazine*.

-- Let us rather instill into their minds sentiments of universal benevolence to men of all nations and colours. Wars originate in error and vice. Let us eradicate these, by proper modes of education, and wars will cease to be necessary in our country. The divine author and lover of peace "will then suffer no man to do us wrong; yea, he will reprove kings for our fake, faying, touch not my anointed and do my people no harm." Should the nations with whom war is a trade, approach our coasts, they will retire from us, as Satan did from our Saviour, when he came to assault him; and for the same reason, because they will "find nothing in us" congenial to their malignant dispositions; for the flames of war can be spread from one nation to another, only by the conducting mediums of vice and error.

I have hinted at the injury which is done to the health of young people by some of their amusements; but there is a practice common in all our schools, which does more harm to their bodies than all the amusements that can be named, and that is, obliging them to fit too long in *one place*, or crowding too many of them together in *one room*. By means of the former, the growth and shape of the body have been impaired; and by means of the latter, the feuds of fevers have often been engendered in schools. In the course of my business, I have been called to many hundred children who have been seized with indispositions in school, which evidently arose from the action of morbid effluvia, produced by the confined breath and perspiration of too great a number of children in one room. To obviate these evils, children should be permitted, after they have said their lessons, to amuse themselves in the open air, in some of the useful and agreeable exercises which have been mentioned. Their minds will be strengthened, as well as their bodies relieved by them. To oblige a sprightly boy to sit *seven hours* in a day, with his little arms pinioned to his sides, and his neck unnaturally bent towards his book; and for *no crime!* -- what cruelty and folly are manifested, by such an absurd mode of instructing or governing young people!

*Philadelphia, August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1790*

~ from "Thoughts Upon the Amusements and Punishments which Are Proper for Schools. Addressed to George Clymer, Esq."<sup>11</sup>

~~~\*\*\*~~~

II. The state of property in America, renders it necessary for the greatest part of our citizens to employ themselves, in different occupations, for the advancement of their fortunes. This cannot be done without the assistance of the female members of the community. They must be the stewards, and guardians of their husbands' property. That education, therefore, will be most proper for our women, which teaches them to discharge the duties of those offices with the most success and reputation.

¹¹ Clymer, also from Pennsylvania, was a signer of both the Declaration and the Constitution. *Ibid.* pp. 60-63.

III. From the numerous avocations from their families, to which professional life exposes gentlemen in America, a principal share of the instruction of children naturally devolves upon the women. It becomes us therefore to prepare them by a suitable education, for the discharge of this most important duty of mothers.

IV. The equal share that every citizen has in the liberty, and the possible share he may have in the government of our country, make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified to a certain degree by a peculiar and suitable education, to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government...

The branches of literature most essential for a young lady in this country, appear to be,

I. A knowledge of the English language. She, should not only read, but speak and spell it correctly. And to enable her to do this, she should be taught the English grammar, and be frequently examined in applying its rules in common conversation.

II. Pleasure and interest conspire to make the writing of a fair and legible hand, a necessary branch of a lady's education. For this purpose she should be taught not only to shape every letter properly, but to pay the strictest regard to points and capitals.

I once heard of a man who professed to discover the temper and disposition of persons by looking at their hand writing. Without enquiring into the probability of this story; I shall only remark, that there is one thing in which all mankind agree upon this subject, and that is, in considering writing that is blotted, crooked, or illegible, as a mark of vulgar education. I know of few things more rude or illiberal, than to obtrude a letter upon a person of rank or business, which cannot be easily read. Peculiar care should be taken to avoid every kind of ambiguity and affectation in writing *names*. I have now a letter in my possession upon business, from a gentleman of a liberal profession in a neighbouring state, which I am unable to answer, because I cannot discover the name which is subscribed to it. For obvious reasons I would recommend the writing of the first or christian name at full length, where it does not consist of more than two syllables. Abbreviations of all kind in letter writing, which always denote either haste or carelessness, should likewise be avoided. I have only to add under this head that the Italian and inverted hands which are read with difficulty, are by, no means accommodated to the active state of business in America, or to the simplicity of the citizens of a republic.

III. Some knowledge of figures and book-keeping is absolutely *necessary* to qualify a young lady for the duties which await her in this country. There are certain occupations in which she may assist her husband with this knowledge and should she survive him, and agreeably to the custom of our country be the executrix of his will, she cannot fail of deriving immense advantages from it.

IV. An acquaintance with geography and some instruction in chronology will enable a young lady to read history, biography, and travels, with advantage; and thereby

qualify her not only for a general intercourse with the world, but to be an agreeable companion for a sensible man. To these branches of knowledge may be added, in some instances, a general acquaintance with the first principles of astronomy natural philosophy and chemistry, particularly, with such parts of them as are calculated to prevent superstition, by explaining the causes, or obviating the effects of natural evil, and such as are capable of being applied to domestic, and culinary purposes.

V. Vocal music would never be neglected, in the education of a young lady, in this country. Besides preparing her to join in that part of public worship which consists in psalmody, it will enable her to soothe the cares of domestic life. The distress and vexation of a husband -- the noise of a nursery, and, even, the sorrows that will sometimes intrude into her own bosom, may all be relieved by a song, where sound and sentiment unite to act upon mind, I hope it will not be thought foreign to this part of our subject to introduce a fact here which has been suggested to me by my profession, and that is, that the exercise of the organs of the breast, by singing, contributes very much to defend them from those diseases to which our climate, and other causes, have of late exposed them. -- Our German fellow citizens are seldom afflicted with consumptions, nor have I ever known but one instance of spitting of blood among them. This, I believe, is in part occasioned by the strength which their lungs acquire, by exercising them frequently in vocal music, for this constitutes an essential branch of their education. The music-master of our academy has furnished me with an observation still more in favour of this opinion. He informed me that he had known several instances of persons who were strongly disposed to the consumption, who were restored to health, by the moderate exercise of their lungs in singing.

VI. Dancing is by no means an improper branch of education for an American lady. It promotes health, and renders the figure and motions of the body easy and agreeable. I anticipate the time when the resources of conversation shall be so far multiplied, that the amusement of dancing shall be wholly confined to children; But in our present state of society and knowledge, I conceive it to be an agreeable substitute for the ignoble pleasures of drinking, and gaming, in our assemblies of grown people.

VII. The attention of our young ladies should be directed, as soon as they are prepared for it, to the reading of history -- travels -- poetry -- and moral essays. These studies are accommodated, in a peculiar manner, to the present state of society in America, and when a relish is excited for them, in early life, they subdue that passion for reading novels, which so generally prevails among the fair sex. I cannot dismiss this species of writing and reading without observing, that the subjects of novels are by no means accommodated to our present manners. They hold up *life*, it is true, but it is not as yet *life* in America. Our passions have not as yet "overstepped the modesty of nature." Nor are they "torn to tatters," to use the expressions of the poet, by extravagant love, jealousy, ambition, or revenge. As yet the intrigues of a British novel, are as foreign to our manners, as the refinements of Asiatic vice. Let it not be said, that the tales of distress, which fill modern novels, have a tendency to soften the female heart into acts of humanity. The fact is the reverse of this. The abortive sympathy which is excited by the recital of imaginary distress, blunts the heart to that which is real; and, hence, we

sometimes fee instances of young ladies, who weep away a whole forenoon over the criminal sorrows of a fictitious Charlotte or Wert[h]er, turning with disdain at three o'clock from the sight of a beggar, who solicits in feeble accents or signs, a small portion only of the crumbs which fall from their fathers' tables.

~ from "Thoughts Upon Female Education, Accommodated to The Present State of Society, Manners, and Government, in The United States Of America. Addressed to the Visitors of the Young Ladies' Academy in Philadelphia, 28th July, 1787, At the Close of the Quarterly Examination, and Afterwards Published at the Request of the Visitors."¹²

~~~\*\*\*~~~

7thly. Ignominy is universally acknowledged to be a worse punishment than death. Let it not be supposed, from this circumstance, that it operates more than the fear of death in preventing crimes. On the contrary, like the indiscriminate punishment of death, it not only confounds and levels all crimes, but by increasing the disproportion between crimes and punishments, it creates a hatred of all law and government; and thus disposes to the perpetration of every crime. Laws can only be respected and obeyed, while they bear an exact proportion to crimes. -- The law which punishes the shooting of a swan with death, in England, has produced a thousand murders. Nor is this all the mischievous influence, which the punishment of ignominy has upon society. While murder is punished with death, the man who robs on the high-way, or breaks open a house, must want the common feelings and principles which belong to human nature, if he does not add murder to theft, in order to screen himself, if he should be detected, from that punishment which is acknowledged to be more terrible than death.

It would seem strange, that ignominy mould ever, have been adopted, as a milder punishment than death; did we not know that the human mind seldom arrives at truth upon any subject, till it has first reached the extremity of error...

There was a time, when the punishment of captives with death or servitude, and the indiscriminate destruction of peaceable husbandmen, women, and children, were thought to be essential, to the success of war, and the safety of states. But experience has taught us, that this is not the case. And in proportion as humanity has triumphed over these maxims of false policy, wars have been less frequent and terrible, and nations have enjoyed longer intervals of internal tranquility. The virtues are all parts of a circle. Whatever is humane, is wise -- whatever is wise, is just -- and whatever is wise, just, and humane, will be found to be the true interest of states, whether criminals or foreign enemies are the objects of their legislation.

~ from "An Enquiry Into The Effects Of Public Punishments Upon Criminals, And Upon Society. Read In The Society For Promoting Political Enquiries Convened at the House of Benjamin Franklin, Esq. in Philadelphia, March 9th, 1787."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 76-82.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 146-147, 160.

~~~\*\*\*~~~

In the perfection of knowledge, common sense and truth will be in unison with each other. It is now more related to error than to truth, and in the sense in which I have described it, it implies more praise than censure to want it.

To say that a man has common sense, is to say that he thinks with his age or country, in their *false*, as well as their *true* opinions; and the greater the proportion of people, he acts and thinks with, the greater share he possesses of this common sense. -- After all that has been said in its favour, I cannot help thinking that it is the characteristic only of common minds.

To think and act with the majority of mankind, when they are *right*, and differently from them, when they are *wrong*, constitutes in my opinion, the perfection of human wisdom and conduct. The *feelings* and *opinions* of mankind are often confounded; but they are widely different from each other. There may be *just* feelings connected with erroneous opinions and conduct. This is often the case in religion and government. -- But, in general, opinions and feelings are just and unjust in equal degrees, according to the circumstance of age, country, and the progress of knowledge before mentioned.

~ from "Thoughts on Common Sense," Apr. 3, 1791.¹⁴

~~~\*\*\*~~~

### PARADISE OF NEGRO-SLAVES. -- A DREAM.<sup>15</sup>

SOON after reading Mr. [William] Clarkson's<sup>16</sup> ingenious and pathetic essay on the slavery and commerce of the human species, the subject made so deep an impression upon my mind, that it followed me in my sleep, and produced a dream of so extraordinary a nature, that I have yielded to the importunities of some of my friends, by communicating it to the public, I thought I was conducted to a country, which in point of cultivation and scenery, far surpassed any thing I had ever heard, or read of in my life. This country, I found, was inhabited only by negroes. They appeared cheerful and happy. Upon my approaching a beautiful grove, where a number of them were assembled for religious purposes, I perceived at once a pause in their exercises, and an appearance of

---

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 252-253. It was Rush who proposed the title to Thomas Paine's famous and stirring pamphlet, and that else would have been denominated *Plain Truth*. As well, Rush helped him edit, prepare, and publish it. The actual title "Common Sense," however, was first earlier used in a 52 page pamphlet, evidently anonymous, and published in 1772 in New York (city) denominated "Common Sense. In Some Free Remarks on the Efficiency of the Moral Change. Addressed to Those Who Deny Such Efficiency to be Moral."

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 305-310.

<sup>16</sup> Clarkson (1760-1846), author, activist, evangelical Christian, and member of Parliament, was one of the first crusading English abolitionists, and also an inspirer of William Wilberforce (1759-1833); who campaigned along with him, with ultimate success in 1833, to bring about an end to slavery in most of the British Empire.

general perturbation. They fixed their eyes upon me -- while one of them, a venerable looking man, came forward, and in the name of the whole assembly, addressed me in the following language:

"Excuse the panic which you have spread through this peaceful and happy company: we perceive that you are a *white man*. -- That colour which is the emblem of innocence in every other creature of God, is to us a sign of guilt in man. The persons whom you see here, were once dragged by the men of your colour from their native country, and consigned by them to labour -- punishment -- and death. We are here collected together, and enjoy an ample compensation in our present employments for all the miseries we endured on earth. We know that we are secured by the Being whom we worship, from injury and oppression. Our appearance of terror, therefore, was entirely "the sudden effect of habits which have not yet been eradicated from our minds.

"Your apprehensions of danger from the sight of a white man," said I, "are natural. But in me -- you behold a friend. I have been your advocate -- and." -- Here, he interrupted me, and said, "Is not your name -- ?" I answered in the affirmative. Upon this he ran up and embraced me in his arms, and afterwards conducted me into the midst of the assembly, where after being introduced to the principal characters, I was seated upon a bank of moss; and the following account was delivered to me by the venerable person who first accosted me.

"The place we now occupy, is called the *paradise of negro slaves*. It is destined to be our place of residence 'till the general judgement; after which time, we expect to be admitted into higher and more perfect degrees of happiness. Here we derive great pleasure from contemplating the infinite goodness of God, in allotting to us our full proportion of misery on earth; by which means we have escaped the punishments, to which the free and happy part of mankind too often expose themselves after death. Here we have learned to thank God, for all the afflictions our task-masters heaped on us; inasmuch, as they were the means of our present happiness. Pain and distress are the unavoidable portions of half mankind. They are the only possible avenues that can conduct them to peace and felicity. Happy are they, who partake of their proportion of both upon the earth." Here he ended. --

After a silence of a few minutes, a young man, who bore on his head the mark of a wound, came up to me and asked "If I knew any thing of Mr. --, of the Island of --" I told him "I did not." -- "Mr. --," said he, "was my master. One day, I mistook his orders, and saddled his mare instead of his horse, which provoked him so much, that he took up an axe which laid in his yard, and with a u stroke on my head dismissed me from life.

"I long to hear, whether he has repented of this unkind action. Do, sir, write to him, and tell him, his sin is not too great to be forgiven, tell him, his once miserable slave, Scipio, is not angry at him -- he longs to bear his prayers to the offended majesty of heaven and -- when he dies -- Scipio will apply to be one of the convoy, that shall conduct his spirit to the regions of bliss appointed for those who repent of their iniquities."

Before I could reply to this speech, an old man came and sat down by my side. His wool was white as snow. With a low, but gentle voice, he thus addressed me.

“Sir, I was the slave of Mr. --, in the Island of -- I served him faithfully upwards of sixty years. No rising sun ever caught me in my cabin -- no setting sun ever saw me out of the sugar field, except on Sundays and holydays. My whole subsistence never cost my master more than forty shillings a year. Herrings and roots were my only food. One day, in the eightieth year of my age, the over-seer saw me stop to rest myself against the side of a tree, where I was at work. He came up to me, and beat me, 'till he could endure the fatigue and heat occasioned by the blows he gave me, no longer. Nor was this all -- he complained of me to my master, who instantly set me up at public vendue [sic], and sold me for two guineas to a tavern keeper, in a distant parish. The distress I felt, in leaving my children, and grand-children (28 of whom I left on my old master's plantation) soon put an end to my existence, and landed me upon these happy shores. I have now no wish to gratify but one -- and that is to be permitted to visit my old master's family. I long to tell my master, that his wealth cannot make him happy. -- That the sufferings of a single hour in the world of misery, for which he is preparing himself, will overbalance all the pleasures he ever enjoyed in his life -- and that for every act of unnecessary severity he inflicts upon his slaves, he shall suffer ten fold in the world to come.”

He had hardly finished his tale, when a decent looking woman came forward, and addressed me in the following language --. Sir,

“I was once the slave of Mr.--, in the state of --. From the healthiness of my constitution, I was called upon to suckle my Master's eldest son. To enable me to perform this office more effectually, my own child was taken from my breast, and soon afterwards died. My affections in the first emotions of my grief, fastened themselves upon my infant master; He thrived under my care and grew up a handsome young man. Upon the death of his father, I became his property. -- Soon after this event, he lost £. 100 at cards. To raise this money I was sold to a planter in a neighbouring state. I can never forget the anguish, with which my aged father and mother followed me to the end of the lane, when I left my master's house, and hung upon me, when they bid me farewell.”

“My new master obliged me to work in the field; the consequence of which was, I caught a fever which in a few weeks ended my life. Say, my friend, is my first young master still alive? -- If he is -- go to him, and tell him, his unkind behaviour to me is upon record against him. The gentle spirits in heaven, whose happiness consists in expressions of gratitude and love, will have no fellowship with him. His soul must be melted with pity, or he can never escape the punishment which awaits the hard-hearted, equally with the impenitent, in the regions of misery.”

As soon as she had finished her story, a middle aged woman approached me, and after a low and respectful curtsey, thus addressed me.

“Sir I was born and educated in a christian family in one of the southern states of America. In the thirty-third year of my age, I applied to my master to purchase my freedom. Instead of granting my request, he conveyed me by force on board of a vessel and sold me to a planter in the island of Hispaniola. Here it pleased God.” -- Upon pronouncing these words, she paused, and a general silence ensued. -- All at once, the eyes of the whole assembly were turned from me, and directed towards a little white man who advanced towards them, on the opposite side of the grove, in which we were seated. His face was grave, placid, and full of benignity. In one hand he carried a subscription paper and a petition -- in the other, he carried a small pamphlet, on the unlawfulness of the African slave-trade, and a letter directed to the King of Prussia, upon the unlawfulness of war. While I was employed in contemplating this venerable figure -- suddenly I beheld the whole assembly running to meet him -- the air resounded with the clapping of hands -- and I awoke from my dream, by the noise of a general acclamation of -- ANTHONY BENEZET!

~~~\*\*\*~~~

BIOGRAPHICAL ANECDOTES OF ANTHONY BENEZET¹⁷

THIS excellent man was placed by his friends in early life in a counting-house, but finding commerce opened temptations to a worldly spirit, he left his master, and bound himself as an apprentice to a cooper. Finding this business too laborious for his constitution, he declined it, and devoted himself to school-keeping; in which useful employment, he continued during the greatest part of his life.

He possessed uncommon activity and industry in every thing he undertook. He did every thing as if the words of his Saviour were perpetually sounding in his ears, “wist ye not, that I must be about my Father’s business?”

He used to say, “the highest act of charity in the world was to bear with the *unreasonableness of mankind.*”

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 302-304. Benezet (1713-1784) sprang from French Huguenot stock, and had in 1731 emigrated with his family to Philadelphia. Among his other noteworthy achievements, he founded the first anti-slavery society in North America. Some of his anti-slavery tracts include: “Observations on the enslaving, importing and purchasing of negroes with some advice thereon extracted from the yearly meeting epistle of the people called the Quakers, held in London, in the year 1748. Also some remarks on the absolute necessity of self-denial, renouncing the world, and true charity for all such as sincerely desire to be Our Blessed Saviour’s Disciples” (1759, 2nd ed. 1760); “A Short account of that part of Africa, inhabited by the negroes; with respect to the fertility of the country; the good disposition of many of the natives, and the manner by which the slave trade is carried on...” (1762); “A Caution and Warning To Great-Britain and Her Colonies, In a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions” (1766); “Some Historical Account of Guinea...with an Inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave-Trade” (1771), and “A Mite Cast Into the Treasury: Or Observations on Slave-Keeping” (1772), and “A Serious Address to the Rulers of America, On the Inconsistency of Their Conduct Respecting Slavery: Forming a Contrast Between the Encroachments of England on American Liberty, and American Injustice in Tolerating Slavery” (1783).

He generally wore plush clothes, and gave as a reason for it, that after he had worn them for two or three years, they made comfortable and decent garments for the poor.

He once informed a young friend, that his memory began to fail him; "but this," said he, "gives me one great advantage over thee -- for thou canst find entertainment in reading a good book only once -- but I enjoy that pleasure as often as I read it; for it is always new to me."

He published several valuable tracts in favor of the emancipation of the blacks, and of the civilizing and christianizing the Indians. He also published a pamphlet against the use of ardent spirits. All these publications were circulated with great industry, and at his own expense, throughout every part of the United States.

He wrote letters to the queen of Great-Britain, and to the queen of Portugal to use their influence with their respective courts to abolish the African trade. He accompanied his letter to the queen of Great-Britain with a present of his works. The queen received them with great politeness, and said after reading them, "that the author appeared to be a very good man."

He also wrote a letter to the king of Prussia, in which he endeavoured to convince him of the unlawfulness of war. During the time the British army was in possession of the city of Philadelphia, he was indefatigable in his endeavours to render the situation of the persons who suffered from captivity as easy as possible. He knew no fear in the presence of his fellow men, however dignified they were by titles or station, and such were the propriety and gentleness of his manners in his intercourse with the gentlemen who commanded the British and German troops, that when he could not obtain the objects of his requests, he never failed to secure their civilities, and frequently their esteem.

So great was his sympathy with every thing that was capable of feeling pain, that he resolved towards, the close of his life, to eat no animal food. Upon coming into his brother's house one day, when his family was dining upon poultry, he was asked by his brother's wife, to sit down and dine with them. "What!" (said he,) "would you have [me] eat my neighbours?"

This misapplication of a moral feeling, was supposed to have brought on such a debility in his stomach and bowels, as produced a disease in those parts of which he finally died.

Few men, since days of the apostles, ever lived a more disinterested life. And yet, upon his death bed, he said, he wished to live a little longer, that "he might bring down SELF."

The last time he ever walked across his room, was to take from his desk six dollars, which he gave to a poor widow whom he had long assisted to maintain.

He bequeathed after the death of his widow, a house and lot in which consisted his whole estate, to the support of a school for the education of negro children, which he had founded and taught for several years before his death.

He died in May 1784, in the 71st. year of his age.

His funeral was attended by persons of all religious denominations, and by many hundred black people.

Colonel J--n, who had served in the American army, during the late war, in returning from the funeral, pronounced an eulogium upon him. It consisted only of the following words: "I would rather," said he, "be Anthony Benezet in that coffin, than George Washington with all his fame."

July 15, 1788.

William Thomas Sherman
1604 NW 70th St.
Seattle, Washington 98117
206-784-1132
wts@gunjones.com
<http://www.gunjones.com> and http://www.scribd.com/wsherman_1

For Lee's Legion on Face Book:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/LeesLegion/>